A

Quarter of an Hour before Dinner;

OR,

QUALITY BINDING.

A

DRAMATIC ENTERTAINMENT

OF ONE ACT;

AS PERFORMED AT THE

THEATRE ROYAL

IN THE

HAYMARKET.

LONDON:

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EVERY literary effort, feeble as it may be, that would inculcate any private virtue, ſhould be dedicated to private worth; on this ground alone the following TRIFLE would claim Mr. COLMAN'S protection—but he has farther demands on the Author—the manner in which he received it, the attention he paid to the repreſentation, require his public thanks, and he gives them to him with all his heart.—To the PERFORMERS he is little leſs indebted for adding colour and force to a work ſo inconſiderable. He congratulates the PUBLIC in being able to bear with a ſingle ACT of plain, common life, that endeavoured to ſpeak to the heart rather than the fancy; and entruſts it to their peruſal under the hope that they will reliſh it with the ſame pleaſure, and receive it with the ſame indulgence in the cloſet as at the theatre.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MR. LEVEL, - - -	MR. WILLIAMSON.
COL. MODISH, - -	MR. DAVIES.
LD. SIMPER, - - -	MR. R. PALMER,
SIR W. WEALTHY,	MR. KEMBLE.
MR. PLAINWELL, -	MR. AICKIN.
JOHN - - - - -	MR. PHILLIMORE.
WILLIAM, - - -	MR. ABBOTT.

AND

MRS. LEVEL, - -	MRS. BROOKS.

A

Quarter of an Hour before Dinner.

SCENE *a Saloon with folding Doors, which being open diſcover* John *laying a Cloth with Covers.*

Enter Level.

Level.

PRETTY preparations, truly! — John.

John. Sir.

Level. What, are we to have company to-day?

John. No, Sir; only my miſtreſs's friends.

Level. Your miſtreſs's friends!

John. Yes, Sir, my Lord Simper, his uncle the Colonel, and Sir William Wealthy.

Level. Do they dine here?

John. My miſtreſs ordered me to lay knives and forks for 'em.

Level. Very well; put two more.

John. Sir!—What, without orders?

Level. Yes, Sir, for me and Mr. Plainwell.

John.

John. Mr. Plainwell!—Do you think, Sir, my miſtreſs will be pleaſed to have a tradeſman placed at the ſame table with men of diſtinction?

Level. But that tradeſman, puppy, is my friend.

John. Lord, Sir, that's no reaſon at all—it is the laſt place at which one generally meets one's friends.

Level. But I've engag'd him——

John. But my miſtreſs will be out of humour.

Level. That's my concern. Do you lay a knife and fork for him.

John. (Apart.) The devil take me if I do though, without telling my miſtreſs. [*Exit.*

Level, *ſolus.*

My Lord Simper, the Colonel, and Sir William——Ay, at my houſe they ſqueeze my hand, and call me their good friend; abroad they *crane* me, *(Stretching out his neck.)* or if we meet ſo full, as obliges them to notice me, they ſay, with a cool inſolent indifference, "How d'ye do?" and make me bluſh at the honour I receive.—Of what uſe are they?—I aſk this queſtion of my wife every day, and every day in vain.—Egad, a thought ſtrikes me: ſince reaſoning is loſt on her, I'll try the power of facts, and ſhew her her good-

friends

friends in their true colours.—Now to compoſe my countenance for the part.

Enter Mrs. Level.

Mrs. L. What's this John tells me, my dear?

Level. I really don't know, my dear.

Mrs. L. Why, that you have ordered him to lay a plate for Mr. Plainwell.

Level. Yes, yes, to be ſure I did.

Mrs. L. Does that *Being* dine here?

Level. I've engag'd him.

Mrs. L. You muſt put him off.

Level. Impoſſible; it is too late—I expect him every moment.

Mrs. L. You ſhou'd have given me notice, Sir. I can't ſubmit to place him with people of rank.

Level. Theſe gentlemen are *your* friends, Plainwell is *mine*. I receive them out of complaiſance to you; do you receive him out of love to me.

Mrs. L. But, my dear, only think what a ſtrange looking figure——

Level. Now in my mind he's a very good figure; beſide, he's a good man, an excellent companion, and never without his little joke.

Mrs. L. Fye, fye, my dear, the man's a downright vulgar citizen.

Level.

Level. Wou'd you have a tradeſman apé the dreſs and air of a lord?

Mrs. L. Why not?—'Tis vaſtly in faſhion.

Level. Yes—among bankrupt ſwindlers to keep up falſe credit, and ignorant ſhopmen at the expence of their maſters.

Mrs. L. Men of ſuch a figure as Mr. Plainwell are well enough behind counters, but not at one's table. We ſhou'd arrange one's company, you know.

Level. Arrange!—If my Lord thinks himſelf diſhonour'd to ſit next my friend, let him dine with his own, ſharpers and dice-coggers. I am tired of receiving company, who deſpiſe me while they are complimenting the flavour of my veniſon and excellence of my wine.

Mrs. L. Theſe are ſtrange fancies, Sir; whimſical, dirty, trade-bred fancies.—There is not one of them but has offered you their ſervices a thouſand times a day.

Level. Yes, becauſe they know well enough I have hitherto had no occaſion for them.

Mrs. L. You are ever miſtruſtful, Sir.

Level. Softy, ſoftly—you are ſure their profeſſions are ſincere.

Mrs. L. Very ſure.

Level. And that they are ready to extricate me from any difficulty?

Mrs. L. Aſſuredly.

Level. 'Tis lucky, for I ſtand at this moment in a moſt diſtreſſing predicament.

Mrs. L. Is it poſſible?

Level.

Level. Very poſſible.—I have been weak enough to lend my name to one who was thought as good a man as any upon 'Change; his wife, it ſeems, was a very extravagant woman, fond of keeping *quality* company.—He ſtopp'd payment this morning, and I am obliged to take up a bill for a thouſand pounds, which muſt be found in the courſe of the day, and all my money went for the laſt new purchaſe.

Mrs. L. Does this make you uneaſy?

Level. Is it not enough to do ſo?

Mrs. L. Have you no friends, Mr. Level?

Level. Friends, Ma'am! Shew me the man who has any.

Mrs. L. I have.

Level. You flatter yourſelf.

Mrs. L. Either of thoſe who are to dine with us would take pleaſure in aſſiſting you, and the only thing which embarraſſes me is to which I ſhall give the preference. Lord Simper won three thouſand laſt night at *vingt un*, and the Colonel received yeſterday two and twenty hundred for an old account of Sir William.

Level. If I might adviſe, try the firſt that comes.

William *announces Colonel* Modiſh.

Mrs. L. Well, Colonel, I've been waiting for you with impatience.

Col. You are too good, Ma'am; don't my nephew Lord Simper, and Sir William dine with us?

Mrs. L. We expect 'em.

Col. So much the better, we ſhall be as gay as larks—you give moſt exquiſite dinners; does'n't ſhe, Mr. Level?

Mrs. L. My cook is tolerable.

Col. Oh, exquiſite! I ſhould adore him; but really you and Mrs. Level make ſuch good uſe of him, it would be a ſhame to take him from you.

Mrs. L. Ah, Colonel! you are much inclined to be luxurious.

Col. Inclined, Ma'am! ſay that I am ſo; one muſt have ſome little amiable defect to be fit for good company—beſide, what ſhould I do with my money but for regaling my friends.—I obtained an order from the treaſury yeſterday, for arrears due the laſt war, and—

Mrs. L. Your nephew will not be ſorry for that, Colonel.

Col. My nephew ſhall never enjoy a farthing of it.

Level. Why, he is your neareſt relation.

Col. My relations are my friends, and the unfortunate—

Mrs. L. But, how do you mean to uſe all your money?

Col. Keep it, Madam; it never gives a man trouble.

Mrs.

Mrs. L. How do you diſpoſe of it?

Col. In my ſtrong box.

Level. But then you loſe the intereſt.

Col. But then I don't riſk the capital.

Mrs. L. I have a mind to diſpoſe of a thouſand for you, and in a manner that will give you infinite pleaſure.

Col. Pleaſure! in what way?

Mrs. L. Have you not a regard for my huſband?

Col. A moſt ſincere one.

Level. Much obliged to you, Sir!

Mrs. L. He has a preſſing occaſion for a thouſand guineas—

Col. Ay!

Mrs. L. Yes; and I've aſſur'd him he may rely upon you.

Col. Madam, my regard is too violent; I can never ſubmit to loſing my friend.

Level. Loſing your friend, Sir?

Col. Yes; every man loſes his friend that lends him money.

Mrs. L. To whom do you lend, then?

Col. To nobody, Madam.

Mrs. L. To a friend in diſtreſs?

Col. Why ſhould I diſtreſs myſelf, or riſk my own property to ſave that of another.—As long as Mr. Level may ſtand in need of my recommendation or my table, let him make uſe of them without ceremony; my purſe is open to no man.

Level. Then you loſe one of the greateſt pleaſures of life.

Col. A pleaſure I've been long ſince cured of—formerly, like all young men at their firſt *entrè*, I was infected with the vice of obliging—what did I get? Ten monſters of ingratitude, and not one friend. Mrs. Level, good morning — Mr. Level, your humble ſervant.

Mrs. L. Won't you dine with us, Colonel?

Col. I cannot have that honour; I have juſt recollected a previous engagement, or elſe——

Level. Oh, Sir, no ceremony between *friends*. [*Exit* Col.

Enter John.

Level. John.

John. Sir.

Level. Take away the Colonel's knife and fork.

Mrs. L. And never ſet it again.

Level. Well!

Mrs. L. He's a monſter.

Level. Like the reſt.

Mrs. L. How could I expect kindneſs from a wretch who denies his relations!

Level. "His relations are his friends and the unfortunate."

Mrs. L. It is very ſingular that men who have the leaſt feeling ſhould talk moſt of benevolence.

Level.

Level. It coſts nothing—'tis the ſame with courage and honeſty.

Mrs. L. A man of condition too.

Level. Live with your equals, 'tis amongſt them are to be found ſome old-faſhioned principles, ſome precious relics of that ancient frankneſs and benevolence which can alone form the ſolid baſis of friendſhip.

Mrs. L. Mr. Plainwell, for example.

Level. I ſhould place a greater confidence on him than on lords.

Mrs. L. Well; here he is — entruſt him with your embarraſſment—

Level. And he'll relieve me.

Enter Mr. Plainwell.

Plainwell. Morrow, morrow — fine day; plaguy hot—I come to dine with you.

Mrs. L. You do us great honour.

Plainwell. Not much of that; but I'll do honour to your dinner; running about to the four corners whets my appetite; and all for nothing—no pay, no caſh—what the devil's become of the money.

Mrs. L. You are worth a large ſum, Mr. Plainwell.

Plainwell. In figures, Ma'am; on my books.—I'm in ſuch a rage; but I'll vent it on your wine.—Why it's near four.

Level. Yes; but my wife expects Sir William and Lord Simper.

Plainwell.

Plainwell. That is to ſay, there are no hopes of dinner till ſix. — John, bring me a cruſt, and a glaſs of wine; let it be good, d'ye hear.

Mrs. L. What a barbarian. *(Aſide.)*

Plainwell. Level, I'm not pleas'd with you.

Level. Why ſo?

Plainwell. You are not in ſpirits; heark'ee, your wife expects ſome fine gentlemen; my company may be diſagreeable; tell me ſo; I can dine on a chop.

Level. What an idea! — Indeed my ſpirits are flurried — I have been weak enough to anſwer for a man who has juſt fail'd, and muſt find a thouſand guineas immediately.

Plainwell. A thouſand and fifty pounds immediately — have you it by you?

Level. No.

Plainwell. Nor I neither.

John. (Offering the bread and glaſs.) Here, Sir.

Plainwell. (Taking up his hat and cane.) The devil take it. [*Exit.*

Mrs. L. John.

John. Madam.

Mrs. L. Take away Mr. Plainwell's knife and fork for ever. — "Let us keep company "with our equals; there you'll find ſome "old-faſhioned principles."

Level. His conduct aſtoniſhes more than diſturbs me; I aſked him for nothing.

Mrs.

Mrs. L. He had too much prudence to wait for it.

Will. My Lord Simper.

Enter Lord Simper.

Lord S. My dear Mrs. Level, how do? you look ſweetly! I devote the day to you now—Don't you expect the Colonel? I do long to ſee him.

Mrs. L. The honour of a viſit from him would diſtreſs me very much.

Lord S. Have you quarrelled?—I do congratulate you moſt heartily—a tedious, tireſome puppy!—but that we are related, and his odd guineas may ſometimes be of ſervice to me, we ſhould never meet. But what was the diſpute?

Mrs. L. He had juſt received two thouſand guineas from——

Lord S. I helped him to it—the ungrateful!—Well——

Mrs. L. Mr. Level was in want of half of it.

Lord S. What, this dear fellow?—What a thoughtleſs dog am I! Egad, I did not ſee you before; do you dine with us?

Level. I hope ſo, my Lord.

Lord S. That's well, that's well *(ſhaking him by the hand)*——But I muſt abuſe you—hah—ſome ſnug little chicken!—hah! you

ſhall

ſhall introduce me to her—extravagant,—hah, rot 'em, they're all ſo!—[*Apart.*]

Mrs. L. But to return to the Colonel—

Lord S. True, true, we were on his eternal chapter—

Mrs. L. He refuſed me the money.

Lord S. Like him, like him—but why not apply to me, my dear Madam? I would ſacrifice my life to oblige you.

Mrs. L. Young men, my Lord, are ſometimes embarraſſed.

Lord S. I embarraſs'd!—oh, Lord, never!—but your huſband has no confidence in me; he does not know my love for him—but let's ſee, what is this matter?

Level. I have been weak enough to be bound for one who has failed.

Lord S. That's nothing new in the world—a common thing!

Level. And if the money cannot be procured, I'm ruined.

Lord S. Ruined!—why every body are ruined—a clear caſe! and does this alarm you? Come, come, I ſhould not dine contented till it is ſettled.

Mrs. L. (*Apart.*) Well—

Level. (*Apart.*) I could not have thought it.

Lord S. Take your hat, my carriage waits, and we'll go inſtantly——

Level. Where, my Lord?

Lord

Lord S. To my attorney's—the beſt fellow in England—a civil raſcal—that, if your houſe was full, would rid you of all uncivil raſcals in an hour: he'll ſoon ſettle your ſcoundrel creditors; he pays all mine. I'll, I'll—egad, it's good ſport!—I'll ſhew you ſome day how he manages them; they are glad to give me what time I aſk.

Level. It is not time, but money that I want.

Lord S. That he never parts with—but you've only paſſed your word.

Level. It was on that the money was lent.

Lord S. Give your word to pay when you are able.

Level. That will not be fulfilling my engagement.

Lord S. Don't we make engagements every day under a certainty of breaking them?

Level. Mine I hold ſacred.

Lord S. You've made one, you ſee, that is not likely to be fulfilled, at leaſt in your way; why, is not every body in debt?—Do let me ſettle it for you.

Mrs. L. You may eaſily do that, my Lord, a part of the money you won laſt night—

Lord S. Is inviolably ſacred, for I promiſed to give the revenge to-night, and may loſe it all again. But, my dear fellow, if you go to my attorney's, depend on his fidelity.—Adieu.

Level. I'm your Lordſhip's very humble ſervant.

Lord S. You may always rely upon me, my dear friend; you'll find me at all times ready to ſerve you; at preſent, indeed, the Duke expects me. [*Exit.*

Level. There goes a third friend, the fourth remains but to ſtrengthen my opinion.

Mrs. L. And can Wealthy——

Level. He's a banker, and knows the value of money.

Mrs. L. He has ſo much of it.

Level. Does he think he has enough?

Mrs. L. The ſum is ſo trifling to him.

Level. Can he gain any thing by it?

Mrs. L. The pleaſure of obliging a diſtreſſed friend.

Level. That's a traffic little known upon 'Change—but I'll leave you with him, to endeavour at reclaiming the privileges of friendſhip.

Mrs. L. And can I expect to find more benevolence in him than in men born in a ſuperior rank? How have I choſen my companions! But it was the choice of pride, not of the heart.

Enter William.

Will. Sir William Wealthy,

Enter

Enter Sir William Wealthy.

Sir Will. I confeſs, Madam, to have outſtayed my time, but neceſſity muſt plead my excuſe; we had a meeting of the profeſſion to conſider a propoſal of the miniſter—not nine per cent.—it won't do, Madam, not a ſoul was pleaſed, and all complaining of bad times.

Mrs. L. You was not ungrateful enough to be of the number.

Sir Will. Oh, no, every thing ſucceeds with me.

Mrs. L. You are a happy man.

Sir Will. A hundred per cent. more than I deſerve.—Where are our friends? I ſaw the Colonel upon 'Change for an inſtant, who ſwore he would not miſs dining with you for another regiment.

Mrs. L. You'll meet them no more here. You know them both to be in caſh—Mr. Level wanted money, and they both refuſed him.

Sir Will. So much the better, why did'nt he come to me? I could raiſe a hundred thouſand in an hour—How much does he want?

Mrs. L. A thouſand guineas.

Sir Will. So trifling a buſineſs is rather beneath me; but to oblige you, Madam—How happens it? Relate, and I'll tell you whether the buſineſs is good or bad.

Mrs. L. Mr. Level was bound——

Sir Will. Oh, aye—his friend fails, and he in concert wants to buy in the debt.

Mrs. L. He is incapable of an act of ſuch baſeneſs—he was bound——

Sir Will. He ſhould not have been bound without the amount in hand; here ſtand I, who would not be bound for my brother—who anſwers, pays.

Mrs. L. That's what Mr. Level wiſhes.

Sir Will. It is very proper to aſſiſt one's friends when they're making money, but never when they are throwing it away, when they have no prudence, when they are bound for people.

Mrs. L. Then, Sir William, we are not to depend upon you.

Sir Will. Certainly not.—Yet if Mr. Level can give good ſecurity—Harkee, let him call at my office; I'll recommend him to my firſt clerk—he undertakes matters of this ſort; for my part, I never meddle with them. He's a very obliging man, and if he finds there's no riſk, why, on my recommendation, he'll be happy to oblige Mr. Level.—You have jewels, Ma'am, you may be ſome time without them—I dare ſay they'll do.

Mrs. L. Then your obliging clerk is a pawnbroker.

Sir Will. Every banker, Madam, has ladies jewels in his poſſeſſion ſome time or other.

Mrs. L. Mr. Level will be back directly; you may explain more fully to him.

Sir

Sir Will. Oh no, he knows the nature of buſineſs—beſide, I'm extremely ſorry, but it is impoſſible for me to wait.—Let him ſee my clerk, d'ye mind; I'll ſpeak to him firſt.—Your ſervant. [*Exit.*

John. Ma'am! [*Lifting up a knife and fork.*

Mrs. L. Yes, John, and for ever.

Enter Mr. Level.

Level. Well—Sir William—

Mrs. L. Is—like the reſt. You knew mankind better than I did—they are monſters.

Level. Not all. We are, I hope, unfortunate in our acquaintance.

Mrs. L. Oh! I hate them all together.

Level. Your hatred, as your love was, is too extenſive; there is a juſt medium. Place no improper confidence, you'll ſeldom be deceived—aſk few favours, and you may ſometimes be obliged—reſpect the name of friend, but endeavour never to put it to the proof.

Mrs. L. Friend! there is none.

Level. Perhaps, but few. I wiſh'd to effect your conviction.

Mrs. L. But who is to extricate you?

[*Noiſe within.*

Enter Plainwell.

Plainwell. I tell you, I will come in.

Level. Is it you, Mr. Plainwell?

Plain-

Plainwell. Yes I, who have wiſh'd you at the devil a thouſand times. Here, take this infernal money, and do give me ſome dinner, for God's ſake.—I'm half dead with fatigue and hunger.

Mrs. L. And have you had the kindneſs to——

Plainwell. To what—ſerve my friend?—You muſt have little regard for me, if you think this an obligation.

Level. If you knew but how much I am indebted to you.

Plainwell. Give me the money again, then.

Level. But, hear me; To cure this Lady of her fondneſs for brilliant company, I have feigned an urgency that ſhe might try the value of tinſell'd friendſhip — the event has ſucceeded beyond my hopes — you have exhibited the picture of a proper alliance, the ſpirit of true friendſhip.—The traffick between hearts for the benefit of both is mutual aſſiſtance.—This is a commercial country; may it ſpread through the whole kingdom.

Plainwell. You don't want the caſh, then.

Level. Indeed I do not.

Plainwell. It was very unneceſſary to make me run half over the town, and without my breakfaſt.

Level. I beg your pardon moſt heartily.

Plainwell. Well, well, never mind, we'll return it—after dinner.

Mrs.

Mrs. L. Did you borrow it, then?

Plainwell. To be ſure.

Mrs. L. Generous man!

Level. Well, my dear, are you convinced?

Mrs. L. I am.—Let us keep company with our equals.

Plainwell. This is all mighty well; but I'm half famiſh'd—where's the dinner?

John. I believe I muſt bring Mr. Plainwell's knife and fork back again; muſt not I, Madam?

Mrs. L. Ay, to be ſure.

Level. And the beſt wine in the cellar, John; ſuch friends are moſt heartily welcome wherever they come.

[*Exeunt omnes.*

THE END.

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